

THE LABRADOR INSTITUTE OF MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY PRESENTS

LABRADOR/ANS ON FILM

SCREENING #3: IMPRESSIONS OF THE INNU

In this, our first screening focusing on the Innu, we have decided to approach things a little differently. Unlike other groups in Labrador, the Innu are unique in that their photographic record (that is, film, video and still photography) documents a fascinating range of external attitudes or impressions toward/of the Innu. And until the comparatively recent work of filmmakers such as John Walker, Nigel Markham, Sarah Sandring and Christine Poker, among others, this photographic record contains little trace of the Innu “voice”. With this in mind, this month’s screening seeks to explore some of these attitudes and impressions in an effort to come to a degree of understanding of the larger history of this photographic record. Remember, the views presented in these films aren’t necessarily the views of the filmmakers themselves. In some cases, the filmmaker is doing exactly what we are trying to do here: examine another people’s attitudes and impressions of the Innu. We hope you enjoy these screenings.

1. *The Indians’ Father Whitehead* (26min 06sec, Memorial University of Newfoundland Extension Service, 1979). Directed by Charles Callanan. Monsignor Edward O’Brien, or Father Whitehead as he was known in Davis Inlet and North West River/Sheshatshiu, is, as far as we can tell, responsible for the earliest film footage of Labrador Innu. This brief documentary examines O’Brien’s ministerial work with the Labrador Innu and, perhaps even more importantly, uses a great deal of both the still and moving photography O’Brien took of the Innu between 1920 and 1945. O’Brien never cut his raw footage into any kind of film: Callanan’s documentary is the only way we can now access this invaluable material. Notice the relationship between O’Brien’s narration and his photography. Is O’Brien’s spoken admiration of the Innu paralleled in his photography?

2. *Untitled*. (20min 38sec, 1950). Photographed and directed by Richard Leacock. It may be said without exaggeration that Richard Leacock is one of the pioneers of documentary film. Leacock, who just passed away this past March, is frequently compared with his mentor, Robert Flaherty, the director of the in/famous *Nanook of the North*. The footage we are showing you here today is from an untitled, unfinished project. In an autobiographical essay called “Life on the Other Side of the Moon,” Leacock had this to say about the footage:

[...] I set off with my wife and our two children aged 3 and 5. We went and camped with a group of Neskapi Indians in central Labrador. We camped with them on the edge of a beautiful lake, Davis Inlet. Happy [Leacock’s wife at the time] was collecting data for her doctoral thesis, and I was determined to make a film, a la Flaherty. I had a 35mm Arriflex, tripod, lenses, an incredibly heavy battery (and no way to charge it) and film. Not much film and not much time. So; tell them what to do and don't waste film... disaster. However, the fundamental problem remained; the absence of sound. Even if we had

the sound capability, the additional problem of language. Filming people who spoke a language that Happy had a smattering of and I no more than a score of words. We talked together about this problem and how it was forcing us back into a "this is how they do it..." film, a process film, making canoes, making snow shoes, cooking, hunting, cutting up and dividing what ever it is that they catch... back to Nanook without the charm, knowledge or skill for that matter!"

Faced with the realization of the film he was able to make under the circumstances, Leacock chose to do nothing with the footage rather than create a film that in its approach to its subject would have been a rough copy of *Nanook of the North*. Leacock understood the danger in that. But even though this is not a film, *per se*, this footage is extremely rich, both in the activities it captures and the photographic skill it demonstrates.

3. *In Caribou Country: The Adventures of William Brooks Cabot in Labrador 1903-1910* (28min 06sec, Lazybank Productions, 1997). Directed by Nigel Markham. We close this month's screening with Nigel Markham's precisely crafted examination of the travels of William Brooks Cabot. Cabot meticulously recorded his travels in northern Labrador and experiences with the Mushuau Innu in both written word and still photography. *In Caribou Country* retraces and examines Cabot's journeys through these surviving records. For those of you who attended the last screening, you will immediately recognize Markham's finely honed technique of filming still photographs to assist in the telling of the story. But if you look even closer, you will notice that Markham uses Cabot's photographs as the basis for creating his own visuals. Often a still taken by Cabot will fade into Markham's recreation of that same shot. No mean feat! What is important to remember when watching this film is that the words presented to are those of Cabot himself – they are not Markham's. Sometimes, films that attempt to retrace the activities or thoughts of others are difficult to situate. This is one of the unique characteristics of film as an art.

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Lazybank Productions